

Whistleblowing Policy

1. Overview

1.1 This policy outlines what you should do if you suspect something happening at work is putting you or others in danger, or is illegal or unethical.

1.2 It applies to all employees, contractors, consultants, officers, casual and agency workers. It does not form part of your contract of employment and can be amended at any time.

2. What is whistleblowing?

2.1 Our aim is to maintain the highest standards of integrity in everything we do, but all organisations can occasionally be affected by conduct that is dangerous, against the law or breaches ethical or professional codes. Should you have such concerns, we encourage you to report them immediately — this is called ‘whistleblowing’. You can be assured that we will take your concerns seriously, they will be thoroughly investigated, and you can be confident there will be no reprisals.

2.2 The types of concerns you may want to raise with us by whistleblowing include:

- any activity you suspect is criminal
- any activity you suspect puts health and safety at risk
- any activity you suspect may damage the environment
- any activity you suspect is a miscarriage of justice
- any activity you suspect breaches our policy on bribery and corruption
- any failure to comply with legal or regulatory obligations
- any failure to meet professional requirements
- any attempt to conceal one or more of these activities.

2.3 Speak to your manager or HR if you are not sure whether something you have become aware of is covered by this policy. Note that this policy does not cover anything to do with you personally — how other people are treating you, for example. For this, please refer to our policies on bullying and harassment and then to our grievance procedure for guidance on how to proceed.

3. How to raise a whistleblowing concern

3.1 In most cases, you should start by raising your concerns with your manager, either face-to-face or in writing.

3.2 If you would prefer not to go to your manager, or your manager fails to address all your concerns, you should raise your concern with one of the following:

Specialist Whistleblowing Officer	Area of Speciality
Chief Auditor	Concerns regarding fraud, corruption or misappropriation of council assets or resources
Chief Legal Officer	Concerns relating to the conduct of members
ICT Manager	Concerns relating to misuse of Information Technology such as the email and internet
Executive Manager for People, Customer and Business Support	Concerns relating to conduct of staff in general and specific issues of discrimination, harassment etc.

3.3 Your letter should say that you are raising your concerns under this policy and then explain what they are. Include all the key facts, dates, and the names of the people involved.

3.4 You will be invited to a meeting to discuss your concerns, and you are entitled to be accompanied at this and any subsequent meetings by a colleague or trade union representative. If you bring a companion, you must both agree to keep your disclosures confidential before and after the meeting and during any investigation that may follow.

3.5 After the initial meeting, we will investigate your concerns and we may ask you to attend further meetings. To investigate properly, we may involve specialists with particular knowledge or experience of the issues you have raised.

3.6 You will be kept informed about how our investigations are progressing and how long they are likely to take. Sometimes, however, we may be unable to give you details about the investigation (or any action it leads to) as we need to protect confidentiality. We understand this may be frustrating and give you concerns about whether we have actually done anything, and if this happens we will do our best to sit down with you and explain why we are acting in the way we are.

3.7 Your concerns will be addressed fairly, but we cannot guarantee the outcome of our investigations will be the one you want. If you are not satisfied with how we have conducted the investigations, you can take the matter to the Director Corporate Services and Governance for further consideration.

3.8 Most concerns are raised with us in good faith, but occasionally someone makes a false allegation out of malice or because they believe they have something to gain. Anyone found doing this will face action under our disciplinary policy and may be dismissed for misconduct, or even gross misconduct.

4. Confidentiality and anonymity

4.1 There is a significant difference between wanting to keep your concerns confidential and making a disclosure anonymously. We actively discourage anonymous whistleblowing.

4.2 You are always encouraged to raise concerns openly, and if you prefer to do so in confidence we will do all that we can to ensure your identity remains hidden. We may want to disclose your identity to people involved in the investigation, but will always discuss this with you first.

4.3 You are protected from reprisals under this policy (see paragraph 5), but if you are still worried we encourage you to discuss this with us and we will explore how far we can go in keeping your concerns confidential.

4.4 Concerns raised anonymously are very difficult — and sometimes impossible — to investigate. We can't properly establish whether your allegations are credible without being able to ask you for more details or for clarification, and this makes it hard to reach an informed decision. This is why we urge you not to report matters anonymously.

5. How whistleblowers are protected

5.1 If you raise a concern in good faith under this policy, we will support you fully even if we find through our investigations that you made a mistake. However, if you feel you have been treated detrimentally as a result of raising a concern, you must tell us at once. First inform your manager and, if the matter remains unresolved, you must follow the formal process in our grievance procedure.

5.2 Part IVA of the Employment Rights Act 1996 provides protection for workers who raise legitimate concerns about specified matters which are called “qualifying disclosures”. A qualifying disclosure is one made in the public interest if you have a reasonable belief that:

- a criminal offence;
- a miscarriage of justice;
- an act creating risk to health and safety;
- an act causing damage to the environment;
- a breach of any other legal obligation; or
- concealment of any of the above;

is being, has been, or is likely to be, committed. It is not necessary to have proof that such an act is being, has been, or is likely to be, committed - a reasonable belief is sufficient.

If you make such a protected disclosure you have the right not to be dismissed, subjected to any other detriment, or victimised, because you have made a disclosure.

5.3 You can seek further advice on whistleblowing, protecting confidentiality, and being protected from reprisals from the independent charity Public Concern at Work, which offers a confidential helpline on 020 7404 6609; www.pcaw.org.uk.

6. Taking your concerns outside the Council

6.1 This policy outlines the process for raising, investigating, and resolving wrongdoing within the workplace. It is rarely necessary – or, from our point of view, desirable – for anyone outside the Council to become involved when a whistleblowing allegation is made.

6.2 In some exceptional circumstances, you may need to go to an external body — an industry regulator, for example — and the independent charity Public Concern at Work (contact details in

paragraph 5.3) can direct you towards the appropriate regulator for the type of issue you want to raise.

6.3 This policy covers the actions of third parties such as suppliers, service providers, and clients, as well as our staff. Should you have concerns about a third party, you are encouraged to raise them with us before approaching anyone else. Your manager or HR will be able to explain how you should proceed.

6.3 Alerting the media to a concern — particularly before or during an internal investigation — is almost never justified or appropriate in any situation. We strongly discourage you from doing so, and will treat any contact with the press as a serious disciplinary issue justifying dismissal unless exceptional circumstances exist. We would normally expect you to have taken all reasonable steps to deal with the matter internally or with an external regulator, and to have taken full advice from a lawyer or Public Concern At Work before being justified in approaching the press.